Culture of Beauty: Complete Series

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Introduction

As women, we often forget that we are *simply* beautiful without making any adjustments to our faces and bodies. We also forget that there are other types of beauty aside from physical beauty.

Though these are simple truths, we often live our lives constantly trying to *enhance* our bodies in some shape or form to be *more* beautiful and to *appear* more attractive to ourselves and others.

One day, I decided to go one year of not utilizing any makeup products. This experience helped me to love and accept my natural self, *more* than I did before I commenced the journey; my self-esteem and self-confidence inevitably benefitted and soared from completing this journey. I have never heavily and consistently utilized makeup, but I still often used mascara and eyeliner to give me that "pop". This journey of not using makeup

enlightened me of how dependent a woman can become on even the simplest makeup tools and techniques to enhance her appearance.

The culture of beauty thrives on others' consistent dependence on different "beauty enhancing" techniques such as cosmetics, plastic surgery, and fad diets; my goal is to avoid dependence on beauty enhancing techniques to prevent myself from being an active participant in this artificial culture.

I spent a lot of my life as an unconscious participant in the culture of beauty. The consistent messages, advertisements, and media have affected me at many points in my life, and I often allowed (without even realizing it) these messages to internalize and influence me in ways that made me more self-conscious of my body. I know that if the media and the beauty industry have affected me, then they have probably affected numerous others as well.

This book derived from a research paper I completed at the University of Georgia. I felt it necessary to expand on the paper because beauty culture affects ample amounts of people across the globe, which makes it a relevant topic. I do not write this book to criticize the beauty industry, but to speak candidly about it. I do not write this book to chastise people who take meticulous care of their appearance and utilize beauty techniques to enhance their appearance.

The purpose of this piece is to communicate how the culture of beauty can affect people in ways they may not even realize; furthermore, I write this book to help people understand the reasons *why* they choose to engage in beauty enhancing techniques. There is a difference between being brainwashed and influenced to believe your body is inadequate versus consciously, but still willingly participating in beauty culture because

you want to--knowing your natural body is *good enough*.

The Culture of Beauty Defined

You may ask, "What is the culture of beauty?" According to Caffrey (2015), “The culture of beauty refers to the prevalent standards of physical attractiveness as dictated by popular opinion.”

Within this culture, certain features are usually focused on such as symmetry, body weight, hair type, and skin tone. The media (e.g. music, magazines, film, entertainment, news, and advertisements) greatly influences what is considered beautiful and attractive.

If you take time to observe the media, you may notice that most women who are in news, film, entertainment, and broadcasting industries are often young (or look younger than their age) and are doused with makeup to *enhance* their physical appearance. Older women, and

presumably less attractive (according to Western societal ideals) women, are often shunned by society and are not often seen in the visible spotlight; *it is as if once a woman ceases to be a sexually consumable object or past a presumable reproductive age, she loses value*. Furthermore, there seems to be a negative correlation between a woman's value and the age of her body. You may also notice that there are considerably *more* men, who are older, that are actively involved in the industries I listed above in comparison to older women.

I believe the culture of beauty perpetuates gender oppression and gender inequality amongst women and men because it often conveys to society that women are *objects* to be enhanced--often for male consumption. Women are continually *reduced* to their bodies; consequently, women are frequently *not* seen as full human beings. Moreover, through this timely cultural norm, women have ended up unconsciously

perpetuating and participating in their own objectification.

There are many forms of gender oppression that are directed at women, and the culture of beauty is only one of them. Many people have never considered the beauty industry to be an extension of the patriarchy or an example of oppression on women; however, if a person observes just how successful this billion-dollar beauty industry is, one may notice that *this industry thrives off the insecurities of women,* which is the fuel that feeds the culture of beauty. Understanding the culture of beauty and its effects on society will help mitigate the powerful influence it has on individuals across the globe.

Gender Oppression: There is not one exclusive definition for gender oppression. Gender oppression can represent unjust treatment or control of a human being. It can also signify mental pressure or mental distress on someone.

Chapter 1: Plastic Surgery (Elective)

Is it wrong to get plastic surgery or is it empowering and demonstrative of the execution of one's owns agency over their body?

Is plastic surgery a breeding ground for insecure women?

"The face was once finite, a unique set of features and a mirror of the soul. You were born with it, lived with it, aged with it, and died with it. Now it's a movable feast; a playground and a battlefield where skin, flesh, and bone are manipulated [...]" (Espejo, 50).

When discussing the culture of beauty, the topic of plastic surgery is salient due to the continuously soaring rates of women who obtain plastic surgery today. "Women account for more than nine-tenths of all cosmetic procedures"

(Espejo, 128). This statistic shows how there is a disproportionate number of women obtaining plastic surgery in comparison to men. This is probably because many women often feel *more* pressure to be physically attractive in comparison to men. Furthermore, the age of people who obtain any form of plastic surgery has been drastically decreasing; there are many females, still in their teenage years, who are obtaining elective surgery to enhance their appearance. Women are not only getting boob jobs and face lifts, but also many sorts of injections all over their bodies.

There are many reasons people get cosmetic surgery. “Plastic surgeons commonly say that [people] today choose surgery [...] –to empower, better, and preserve themselves” (Espejo, 130), but there are countless other reasons that essentially boil down to the need and desire for external validation from others and the sustainment of youth. Having a “good body” and

being attractive (according to societal standards), whether the body is fake or real, can win a person attention, social value, pseudo-confidence, and advantages (e.g. more job opportunities, kindness, admiration, popularity, etc.) in comparison to a person that looks less attractive.

In many cases, the obtainment of *elective* plastic surgery demonstrates that many people have learned to not appreciate their natural *untouched* bodies.

Boobs: The Obsession is Real

A woman's breasts have been noted as one of the most interesting body parts she possesses. Often, a woman will be judged *and* criticized based on the size and shape of her breasts. Everyone (including species) has breasts. So, what has perpetuated this “boob frenzy”? What do *you* think has perpetuated it? It seems that since society has gotten caught up with this *female reproductive organ*, women have also got caught

up into the frenzy. Countless women have forgotten that all breast sizes are beautiful and unique. Large breasts, medium breasts, small breasts, uneven breasts, and flat breasts, are all amazingly beautiful and unique, but many of us have still become consumed and self-conscious about our breasts. *But why? Where did we learn to feel insecure about our breasts?* Many women feel their breasts are: 1. Not big enough and 2. Do not have the right proportions (uneven).

Some women who get surgery base their decision upon what they believe others desire to see and find attractive*;* hence, breast augmentations are one of the most frequently executed procedures.

Side note: If you have never seen a breast augmentation performed, take the time to watch a documentary or a procedure. Observe and analyze the procedure and see how it makes you feel; I know I felt enlightened after I watched a breast augmentation being executed.

Risks

Obtaining a breast augmentation has been a consistent trend amongst the female community. The issue does not lie in obtaining the breast augmentation though; the issue lies in the reasoning behind the breast augmentation. Why do many women put themselves at risk to enhance their physical appearance? Even though there are many successful breast surgeries, there are often many cases where things do not go as planned. *Is putting yourself at risk for a fleeting physical characteristic really worth it?* For some it is, and for others, not so much.

Essentially plastic surgery is the equivalent to *unnecessary* pain that you pay in exchange for what you or others define as more attractive. "[...] a woman is prepared to suffer considerable pain to be remolded to male specifications [...]" (Espejo, 56). The fact that women are willing to put themselves at physical risk for elective

procedures demonstrates how powerful the culture of beauty affects women. Why and how are so many women willing to voluntarily put themselves at risk to enhance their physical appearance? Yes, many cosmetic and plastic surgery procedures are often low risk, *but* there is always a chance for complications and *death;* of course, this does not occur in most cases but *can and does* happen (e.g. Kanye West's mother died from complications of her plastic surgery).

When women consistently consume media messages, without any critical awareness, they intake these messages and become infected by the culture of beauty. Overtime, the consumption of media messages, specifically ones focused on the body or that utilize the body, can decrease the self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-appreciation of an individual; this can potentially occur by simply seeing presumably perfect bodies repeatedly, which inevitably takes a

negative toll on a person's psyche about their own body —*if they allow it*.

From here on, understand and be aware of why you make the choices you do about your body. If you want to obtain plastic surgery or already have, I encourage you to understand the motive behind the desire. Is it because you feel like you are *missing* something, are unattractive, are inadequate without the surgery, or because you want a change along with the opportunity to execute your autonomy? Always seek the motives behind your actions and observe (don't judge) them. But before anyone decides to get any form of cosmetic surgery, I recommend that they work on loving themselves so much that they can consciously question (with little bias) if obtaining the surgery is truly worth it; they should ensure that their mind is full of clarity and not with self-doubt, nor thoughts generating from feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Furthermore, a person should take into

consideration how the consistent intake of various forms of media can insidiously influence their decisions.

Chapter 2: The Beauty Industry

It seems that many women forget just how beautiful their faces are without makeup. In this section on cosmetics, I am specifically referring to the use of makeup on a *woman's face*.

Annalisa Barbieri argues that "cosmetics are not just ways to improve one's looks but are essential to a woman's self-esteem" (Espejo, 102).

However, Carlin Flora, argues that "people are more beautiful than they think they are, and stopping the obsession about your looks [...] can make you look better by improving your confidence" (Espejo, 106). Some people believe that consistently utilizing makeup is not a negative action or habit. Others believe consistently utilizing makeup is an institution of bondage, oppression, and devaluation of the natural body. I do take into consideration that

many individuals use makeup as art, for fun, and some only use makeup on an occasional basis. However, I am focusing on individuals who are dependent on makeup, never leave the house without make-up, and individuals who feel incomplete and less confident without makeup on their faces. If a woman feels that she *must* wear makeup, she is conveying to the world that she does not feel comfortable with her natural appearance, and she does not accept her natural appearance for what it is. Women who become dependent on makeup are essentially in bondage because they feel they cannot go without it.

Furthermore, *quality* makeup is not the cheapest thing to buy; in the long run, the costs of makeup add up overtime, and this could potentially financially hinder some women or cost them thousands of unnecessary spent dollars.

I believe the beauty industry is a highly profitable industry; this industry monetizes individuals'

feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, low self-esteem, and low self-confidence. In my opinion, people who are dependent on makeup are the victims and targets of the beauty industry, because they constantly invest into this billion-dollar industry without receiving anything truly valuable in return except for more objectification of their bodies and a *false sense of self*.

"A mark of their victimization is that they accept their lot in life without visible question, without organized protest, without collective anger or rage" (Hooks, 1).

Many people that habitually use makeup, do not realize how they have been perniciously influenced into this habit. The mere fact that the cosmetic industry directs most of its advertisements and products at women conveys how much more valued a woman's appearance is in comparison to a man's appearance; this also

shows which *gender* or sex is predominantly targeted in this industry.

The pressure to enhance the female body perpetuates the idea that a woman is close to nothing more than her body, and that her body defines her value; it also can inhibit the development of a woman's intellect and unique set of skills that she possesses because she is so *focused on her appearance*. This value and focus that is placed on the female body displaces the value that *should* be placed on a woman's intellect or other valuable and intangible qualities (e.g. character, drive, talents, etc.)

“According to the objectification theory (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997), Western societies sexually objectify women through media images, social interactions, and cultural messages about feminine beauty. This socializes women to self-objectify, that is, to view

themselves as social objects to be judged based on physical appearance" (Ford et al., 254).

Since many women are enculturated to self-objectify themselves, they essentially perpetuate their own dehumanization by treating and viewing themselves as the media and the general society do. Research makes the claim that the widespread utilization and *dependence* on makeup by individuals does not make sense, but it nevertheless improves how a woman feels about herself (somehow).

"It's nonsense on one level, of course, but the power of lipstick, and how it makes a woman feel, must never be trivialized. [...] to the enormous impact makeup and lipstick can have on a woman's psyche, there's more going on than just coloring in one's face (Espejo, 103).

John Gustafson is a skincare guru that donated excess and unused makeup to a women's refuge

center that housed women that had been beaten by their partners. “[...] apparently, it was a huge help psychologically for the women” (Espejo, 104).

So why does makeup help individuals psychologically? In one case, female soldiers were given a large amount of lipstick. Lieutenant Colonel Mervin Willett Gonin said, “At last they could take an interest in their appearance. That lipstick started to *give them back their humanity*” (Espejo 104-105). I think this statement is *profound*; I had to take time to digest this statement because it is extremely shocking. I could understand how the soldiers utilized lipstick to add more distinction to themselves due to homogenization, but why do many women, who have not been homogenized, act like their identity mainly comes through their appearance?

How could makeup, which often makes a woman look less like her natural self, give a woman back

her *humanity* and *identity*? I believe this statement conveyed how many women feel the need to *feel* and *believe* they are beautiful and attractive, which has often been taught to be the most important component of the female identity; in my opinion, this statement shows how women equate their value to their level of beauty. This relationship between beauty and self-value has been established through centuries of societal enculturation, and many women feel that they can elevate their value in society with the usage of makeup.

As Annalisa Barbieri argued, makeup can highly improve a woman's self-esteem and confidence (Espejo, 102), but self-esteem and self-confidence should not be solely based on appearance but should be more so based on internal characteristics. Women have developed a dependence so strong that many women believe it is necessary to use makeup to feel *better* about themselves. This situation hinders many women

from realizing and reaching their full potential as human beings; if women are so focused on their appearance, then they definitely will be distracted from making as many political, technological, social, and economical advances in society as they could if they were not as distracted by such trivial matters.

Media messages that promote unrealistic images of beauty have deceived many women. “The promotion of the [...] sexy ideal in our culture has created a situation where most girls and women don’t like their bodies” (Espejo, 185); Though society body shames both sexes with unrealistic ideals conveyed through the media, I make the claim that this situation is gender focused because more women are body shamed in comparison to men. According to Lamont (2015), “Body shame is a negative self-conscious emotional response to the perceived failure to meet a body ideal and the attribution of that failure to the core self.”

Challenge

As I stated in my introduction, I decided to not utilize any type of makeup for one year. I decided to do this because I wanted to discover for myself what it means to be a woman in our current society that does not utilize any makeup. I wanted to further develop my confidence independent of my appearance. If my skin broke out, I did not mask it. I simply let it heal on its own and let it show to the world. Falling in love with my natural appearance, without any help from cosmetics, was a big goal for me. Loving myself as I am, without trying to enhance my appearance in any way (aside from living a healthy and active lifestyle), is important to me.

Do you have to stop wearing makeup to develop your self-confidence? Of course not. However, I think choosing to not wear makeup for an extended period is a positively enriching and deep experience.

Not engaging in any cosmetics is going against societal norms. Society encourages women to use cosmetics to make themselves *look better*. Society and the media encourage women to always look their *best* even at the simplest of places. Society teaches many women that they *need* makeup and that they look plain or tired without it. By taking a break from makeup, you can navigate your feelings about yourself and most likely deal with some of the pressures that society has placed on you to be beautiful. Taking a break from cosmetics is the equivalent of an external detox. One of my goals is to ensure that I am never dependent on makeup. I want it to only be an accessory or a fun thing to do.

As women, we must learn to love our bodies as they are, and of course, we need to do our part to eat healthy and live an active lifestyle, but we must know that our bodies are perfection no matter what physical stage we are at. The ideas

that: women are not perfect, women need *a little extra help or a* physical boost*,* women should always look their *best, and* makeup is a necessary item to utilize, *are all erroneous*.

If you are a dependent makeup user, try going to simple places without makeup. Take an even bolder step and go to a big event without any makeup on. When I first began my journey of not utilizing makeup, I felt so *naked* and uncomfortable; I felt like my face was so bare and my look was not good enough. However, overtime I have learned to love and enjoy my natural face the way it is. Ironically, after a while I feel like my face became more attractive *to me,* after the long break I took from not utilizing makeup.

Why don't you try to take a break from makeup?

Even if you are going through a breakout, try not using makeup (it is better to not cover up

inflamed skin with makeup to give it time to breathe and heal). Take a week break or even 24-48 hours if you do not feel you can go for longer. By taking a break, you are officially taking a step back from participating in societal norms and becoming conscious of the culture of beauty. By taking this break, you can start to see how you truly feel about your appearance independent of makeup.

"She's so beautiful she doesn't even *need* to wear makeup": As women, let's put a stop to this statement. All women are beautiful. All women are beautiful without makeup. No woman *needs* to wear makeup. When we say things like this, we are telling others that women, who *aren't perceived* (according to societal standards) *as beautiful,* are *inadequate* without makeup on.

Chapter 3: Fitness & Health

I believe consistently investing in your personal health and fitness is the ideal way to transform and maximize your *natural body*.

We have all seen and heard hundreds upon hundreds of advertisements that claim to provide the perfect health, diet, and fitness solution for your body. However, there truly is not *one* perfect plan, solution, or diet. The health and fitness industry is a highly profitable industry because many people care about their appearance and believe in quick fixes, but the best solution to achieving optimal health and fitness, in addition to looking your best is: *consistency*.

Fitness

The fitness industry for women focuses more so on having a lean and toned body. Often, you do not hear much about how to become physically

stronger or how to build muscle mass. On the other hand, men are *usually* taught to focus on being physically strong and to build muscle mass. On the contrary, I believe that weightlifting is a great exercise for women to engage in despite it being a less popular choice amongst women in comparison to cardio.

Weightlifting helps your joints, muscles, and body to become stronger. Weightlifting also enhances your metabolism, which gives you the opportunity to eat more of the foods that you want to eat without them negatively affecting your physique. In addition to cardio, incorporating weightlifting will not get you "big", but provide you with more confidence, strength, and a defined physique. You will also be able to do more things on your own without the help of someone else because you will be physically stronger, which leads to you becoming a more independent person (which is always a plus).

Health

The most important step to living a healthy lifestyle is to eat a healthy and balanced diet; you can discover what this means for your body through trial and error because everyone has a unique body that responds differently to various types of foods. In my opinion, diets are a short-term solution. However, incorporating balanced eating habits is something that you can do for the rest of your life. You most likely are aware that new diets are *always* coming out; this is because there is no single diet that works for everyone.

I enjoy eating healthy, but I do not always eat perfectly healthy. I do my best to eat more healthy foods than less healthy foods, but I still give myself some leeway. A good rule of thumb you can live by is the 60/40 rule; overall, sixty percent of the time I eat healthy, and forty percent of the time I eat less healthy (or regular) foods. Moreover, you want to ensure you do not

feel deprived because deprivation leads to relapses and binging. It is best to execute a plan that is doable, interesting, easy (for the most part) and enjoyable; your plan should make you feel good within yourself (emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually).

There is no need to eliminate food groups (unless of course that is the best decision for your body and you have food sensitivities), because eliminating complete food groups is not a balanced habit. Avoiding carbs and fats because they seem bad for your physical body is not the best long-term approach either. Many women fear carbs and fats, but these nutrients are not bad for your body; there are simply certain carbs and fats which are less beneficial for your body, and there are simply *better* times in the day to eat these types of nutrients.

If you are currently *not* satisfied with your current weight, analyze what you are eating, and

determine what changes you can implement. There are often many things you can decrease in your diet to help you live healthier and feel better which include: fast food and sugar. It is consequential that whatever healthy changes you make are for *you*. If you live healthy for *you,* you will stay consistent. If you incorporate healthier changes to simply look better for others, then your results will most likely be short-lived. Love yourself enough to take care of yourself internally and externally because *you are worth it.*

Chapter 4: Hair & Shaving

Whether you have curly hair, thin hair, straight hair, thick hair, or tightly coiled hair, enjoy your hair pattern. Unfortunately, so many of us are unsatisfied with our hair textures; consequently, many of us consistently run to perms, relaxers, curling tools, flat irons, and color because *we don't like our own hair*.

Do you like your hair? If so, why? If not, why? Explore the reasons. If you don't like your hair what would make you like your hair more? Have you educated yourself on how to take care of your hair to maximize the appearance and health of it? Often, we simply aren't doing the right things to our hair, which greatly affects the appearance of it. **Healthy hair is beautiful hair.**

My philosophy: Do whatever you want to do with your hair. Change your hair as often as you like.

However, do things to your hair as an expression of who YOU are, and not simply due to what culture deems as attractive and in-style.

Shaving

Who came up with the idea that being hairless is more attractive vs. having hair? Have any of us ever considered the possibility that hair may grow in places it is meant to stay in? Why are such painful methods (e.g. Brazilians) taken to be hairless? Why are so many people *okay* with experiencing bumps and rashes after they shave?

Questions to Ask Yourself:

How do *you* feel when you do not shave? Do you feel uncomfortable? Do you feel confident? Do you hide certain areas of your body or purposefully wear different clothes when you do not shave? When you are in public, do you become self-conscious about your armpits and legs if you forgot to shave? If you are involved

with someone, does your partner prefer you shave? Do you enjoy shaving?

Society, culture, and the media all convey many different messages and create many societal norms, but it is up to *us* whether we choose to accept these messages and adopt these "norms". Yes, it is socially *acceptable* and *encouraged* that women shave, but if you don't want to shave, then don't; only shave if you want to and when you want to. It's that simple.

Side Note: Don't forget that there are other ways to keep your body hair groomed (e.g. trimming).

Chapter 5: Race, Skin Color, Exoticism

Skin Color

Much of society continues to perpetuate the belief that having lighter skin is more attractive and having darker skin is less attractive, but who gets to determine what is the most or least attractive?

Brighter and lighter does not mean *prettier and better; all* shades of skin are beautiful. So, why doesn't everyone enjoy the color skin they are in? Furthermore, why do so many people let others decide whether the skin color on their bodies is attractive or not.

Remember...all skin is beautiful. *Your* skin is beautiful. Embrace the skin you are in and accept the fact that you are completely perfect in the skin you were born in.

The Multi-Racial Phenomenon

As time has progressed, so has society. Many people are now in interracial relationships; hence, our multi-racial population is increasing significantly.

Many people find multi-racial people to be more attractive or more interesting in appearance compared to genetically homologous people; when you think about why this could be you can link the reasoning to science.

Genetic diversity is attractive, but why? "[...] mixed-race individuals *appear healthier*. Humans, like other animals, look for markers of good genetic health in their quest for a reproductive partner" (Espejo 46). It is known that the more diversified your genetics are, the healthier and more attractive you are and appear to be. Two people, who come from different genetic and racial backgrounds, that reproduce offspring, produce children that are considerably

more genetically fit compared to a homogenous couple that chooses to reproduce. Furthermore, genetically diverse offspring are potentially less susceptible to many diseases and have lower risks of contracting certain diseases.

So being multi-racial not only can potentially make you appear more attractive but can also provide a more genetically sound and diverse foundation for your offspring (if you choose to have them). But for everyone who is not multi-racial or does not *look* multi-racial, do not fret; it really isn't all that important. If you look around you, you will notice that many non-multi-racial individuals are still healthy and attractive just like their multi-racial counterparts.

Side Note: We can see that people are attracted to health, and genetic diversity conveys signs of health. People often look for features that are both attractive and healthy, and one way they can do this is by observing the skin of individuals.

“Which features radiate both health and beauty? One may be the appearance of skin. In a second experiment, Roberts found that women rated close-up photos of heterozygous males’ skin as healthier than close-ups of homozygous males’ skin, and these judgements correlated with ratings of overall attractiveness” (Espejo, 47).

As we see here, skin can function as a distinguisher of both health and physical attractiveness. However, skin color does not factor into the appearance of health necessarily.

My Exoticism Theory: *Exoticism is another extension of the culture of beauty.* Western society’s standard of beauty has often been defined as: tall, blonde, blue-eyed, and thin. An interesting note is that even though this may seem to still be one of the main standards of beauty, there are many other developing and prevalent standards of beauty that encompass features and characteristics of multiracial people, people with

unique phenotypes, and minorities. “[...] people with mixed [...] origins have become synonymous with exotic glamour” (Espejo 45).

Exoticism thrives off curiosity that derives from ambiguity, which breeds questioning and interest for individuals that appear different than the Caucasian standard (e.g. white, thin, etc.). Throughout my life, I have witnessed people convey more adoration, curiosity, and interest in individuals who appeared to be multi-racial in comparison to homogenous individuals (especially within the African American community). This is important to note because it creates new inequalities and hierarchies within racial and ethnic communities, which is allowing the culture of beauty to become a more complex institution with multiple dimensions of *oppression*.

Chapter 6: Age

The Fountain of Youth Does Not Exist

Ahhhh...youth! The obsession with being young and looking young is ever present in our society. Being young is nice and lovely but being young is a mentality. It is not about your age, but about how you live your life.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and it can be difficult to decipher what true beauty is when society constantly conveys that beauty is synonymous with youth; however, this is not the case. You can be young at any age and at any point and time in your life.

I have learned from a wide range of people how to maintain a young personality and heart throughout life:

Self-Care

It is within our power to take care of ourselves and live and maintain an active, youthful, productive, and fun life. One thing I have noticed that people who value self-care do, is they take care of themselves holistically: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. These people ensure that they maintain their bodies so they can function optimally at every age. They consistently feed their bodies with food that is going to benefit them from the inside out. They feed their spirit with positive messages, positive relationships, and positive habits, which also keeps the emotional and mental aspect of themselves healthy and young as well. Lastly, these people maintain low stress levels and take charge of the decisions that directly and indirectly affect their lives.

Adventure | Fun | Change

Many people that stay young at heart ensure their lives are full of adventure and fun; they also ensure they are constantly growing and putting

themselves in different environments, with different people, and different activities. These people constantly put themselves in different situations that help them stay sharp and keep their lives interesting and rejuvenating. Boredom and monotony can often lead to people feeling desolate and less adventurous. Try incorporating some adventure in your life and observe what happens to your physical appearance, energy levels, and the mental and emotional aspects of your being. Being fully engaged in life keeps you young and interesting; when you have purposeful fun, you maintain life and vitality.

Boundaries

Boundaries are personal limits that you put in place for your life to maintain balance. If you have no boundaries: life, people, and situations will keep you busy, burnt out, ungrateful, bitter, stressed out, physically worn down, and unsatisfied with life. It is consequential to maintain boundaries to maintain a more satisfied

and happy life. People that have boundaries put in place are often the best people to be around because they are in control of their lives; these people stay refreshed, healthy, balanced, and optimistic about life because they are engaging and investing their time in people and activities that are in line with their values. People with boundaries do not always say, “yes” to every invitation they receive for an event, volunteer work, projects and deadlines at work, etc. These people know their limits, and they stay within them to maintain their sanity and balance in life. People with boundaries do not allow others to take advantage of them. Since, these people maintain boundaries they are healthier, livelier, youthful, and happier.

Goals

Life without purpose and goals is a meaningless life. Goals and purpose are the driving factors of your life. Goals are the navigation system of your life. Without goals, you most likely are living

your life without clear direction and less ambition than you could potentially have. If you have written goals, you will most likely achieve these goals at some point and time. If you do not have any goals written down right now, take a moment to write 5 goals you would like to accomplish in your life or this year.

5 Goals - Activity: Take 30 seconds to write down the first 5 goals that come to mind. These are the goals that mean the most to you at this point in your life:

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These (self-care, adventure, fun, change, boundaries, and goals) are a few things that you can incorporate into your life to maintain a youthful spirit; and remember that a youthful spirit can essentially give you a youthful appearance and aura.

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Sometimes being youthful and looking youthful does not lie in the skin and beauty products you are using, but in the way you take care of your body, mind, and spirit. Youth is just as internal as it is external.

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Chapter 7: The Body

What is physically attractive & who decides?

There are many physical standards of attraction within our society, and these standards are *dynamic* in nature. Many of us have even witnessed these shifting standards of physical attractiveness within our society, but it seems that one constant remains--specifically for Western Society: slim is better. However, voluptuous and curvy bodies are increasingly becoming more accepted and desired (another example of the shifting beauty trends in mainstream society).

Skinny Vs. Voluptuous, or *Both*

Since the beginning of time, there have been varying specifications for what is considered physically attractive for the human body.

In America, slim was and still has been the go-to trend for what a female body should look like. However, being curvy and voluptuous has also been a growing trend throughout the years (e.g. Marilyn Monroe, Christina Hendricks, and Nicki Minaj). Another growing trend is the combination of both a small frame plus curves. I am not sure who came up with these trends, but you can always get a feel of what the most popular trends are in the music you listen to and what you see and hear about in any type of media. Also, you can tell what some of the trends are by the way a majority of clothing brands design their clothes. What sizes are these brands making their clothes, and what shapes and sizes of women are these brands catering to?

Despite these trends, it is important to do what is best for yourself. What do you desire your body to look and feel like? What is going to be the most attractive look for your body in *your own opinion?* This is essentially what matters most.

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Society will always have guidelines and physical trends for the body that will make claims and opinions on what is considered most attractive, but at the end of the day it doesn't really matter. At a granular level, being physically attractive may open some doors for you, get you a few more friends, and provide some other shallow perks, but at the end of the day being physically attractive isn't worth much. However, many women spend most of their life and time being concerned with their physical appearance. Many women aim and aspire to look like the perceived "perfect" celebrities they see in the media on a consistent basis. Learn how to decide for yourself what is attractive and leave it at that. Live a healthy and balanced lifestyle that maximizes your body and ignore what is classified as attractive and beautiful according to societal standards.

If you have a naturally thick body, accept it. If you have a naturally slim body, accept it. If you

have a naturally curvy body, accept it. If you have an out of shape body or you feel overweight or want to shed some extra pounds to feel and look healthier, accept where you are currently, while you make some healthy changes at the same time. If you have a muscular body, accept it. All of us have unique and different shapes that we must appreciate. We do not need to give the media the power to decide if our bodies are attractive or not attractive.

Chapter 8: Media Influences

Popular opinion on what is considered beautiful and attractive is often dictated and influenced by the media (e.g. magazines, entertainment, advertisements, music, etc.).

Society's obsession with the body (especially the female body) and physical attractiveness has proved to be highly influential on the body images of women; women's body images have often been negatively affected by society's focus on the female body. Furthermore, women's bodies in general are over-sexualized and magnified to be either criticized or praised.

Media is everywhere. We hear it. We see it. Many of us ponder on it both consciously and subconsciously. We feel it through the messages that are being conveyed (e.g. music). Media is powerful and influential, and media continues to

expand its influence on society in various ways. Because media is so influential on society, it has affected many people both positively and negatively.

Technology in combination with media can really change the way people are depicted in advertisements and entertainment, which delivers consistent standards and examples of *perfection* (which are essentially often impossible to achieve).

People that consistently engage in media everyday (e.g. television, music, social media) are usually affected in some form whether positive or negative. A good way to test how much the media has impacted your self-image is to take a break from social media, television, film, and certain kinds of music for one to three weeks. Notice how you feel about yourself during the duration of your media detox. In fact, you can even take notes on how you feel about yourself

each day while you do this activity. If you complete this activity, be sure to log how you feel about your overall external and internal self before you begin the media detox. I guarantee that, besides having media withdrawals, you will feel more positive about your self-image after completing this activity. If you want to start small, choose one source of media to detox from for one week, and then a different form of media the next week. It is a good idea to take breaks from media *throughout* life to maintain balance.

Media Challenge (1-14 Days):

- Each day, log how you feel about yourself externally and internally. Feel free to log about other things as well.

Pre-Challenge Log Day 0:

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Media Challenge Log Day 1:

Media Challenge Log Day 2:

Media Challenge Log Day 3:

Media Challenge Log Day 4:

Media Challenge Log Day 5:

Media Challenge Log Day 6:

Media Challenge Log Day 7:

Media Challenge Log Day 8:

Media Challenge Log Day 9:

Media Challenge Log Day 10:

Media Challenge Log Day 11:

Media Challenge Log Day 12:

Media Challenge Log Day 13:

Media Challenge Log Day 14:

Music

One of the most powerful and influential types of media is: music. Music videos, music lyrics, music messages, and music meanings are all powerful and can dictate how people feel and live their lives.

Music Videos

Not all music videos perpetuate and convey negative messages. In fact, many music videos are positive, funny, interesting, and entertaining. However, many music videos show people that look perfect. Some videos cast woman for one purpose it seems: objectification (this is changing in many modern videos in some instances). When women are constantly portrayed as objects to be gazed upon with no regard to who they are as a person, it leads many women astray. Many women become obsessed with their *external* image.

Learn to see yourself as a complete person. In many videos, women often wear less clothing

while the men are often fully clad. In my opinion, clothing in music videos can represent how much of “the self” a person is revealing. Women in these videos, who are wearing less clothing than men, are often revealing less of their internal selves by putting more focus and attention on their external bodies, which distracts a person from seeing who they truly are (this constant message also conveys that the internal body is not as important as the external body).

Music Video Recommendation: Colbie Caillat - Try

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Chapter 9: Love Yourself

The goal of this book is to inform you of the culture of beauty. However, another goal of this book is to remind you to love, appreciate, respect, and value yourself. So often as women we let others have the power to choose and decide our worth. It is time to step up and choose how we are going to view ourselves. How can we expect others to treat us with respect if we don't treat ourselves with respect? How can we expect others to view us positively if we don't view ourselves positively?

Learn how to love yourself with everything that comes with you--flaws and all. Be comfortable with who you are and stay true to yourself. People enjoy being around others who appreciate themselves and are comfortable within themselves. Learn to *mold yourself* instead of letting society mold *you*.

Become a conscious participant in different forms of media. In fact, it is important to become a conscious participant of society in general. Be aware of different messages that advertisements, music, images, prominent figures, and people, etc. are conveying to not only you, but everyone else as well. When you understand and are aware of the messages that the media conveys, you will be less affected by it.

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